The feast days of the church had a great influence on the social life of the colonists in Russia. Advent, which included the four Sundays before Christmas, was a season of penance and fasting. The people believed that this was a time to prepare spiritually for Christmas. Wedding celebrations and other gay festivities were very uncommon during this period. Even the singing and playing of music was frowned upon.

Christmas, the most beautiful and memorable day for all Christian people in the world, was for the German colonists in Russia, a spiritual and social occasion.

It is doubtful that many people had a "Christbaum," since evergreen trees were very scarce on the steppes of Russia. Mrs. Alex Schmidt, who was born and raised in a Lutheran family in Russia, tells me that the colonists did, however, use a large shrub in place of the tree, which was decorated and enjoyed as much as the most expensive tree. This shrub grew wild on the steppe and was of no expense to the poor colonist. According to Joseph S. Height in *Paradise on the Steppe* (Tubingen, 1972), "some people planted various kinds of grain in boxes, hoping they might have some greenery in the house during the festive season" (page 187).

The nativity crib was common in many homes among people of all faiths. As the family gathered around the tree or crib on Christmas Eve, the beautiful and universally-known "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" was intoned and the entire family joined in praising the baby Jesus. We can imagine that the traditional "O du Fröhliche, O du Selige" as well as the popular "Ihr Kinderlein kommest" were sung.

2. O seht in der Krippe im ndchtlichen Stall, seht hier bei des Lichtleins hellglanzenden Strahl. In reinlichen Windeln das himmlische Kind, viel schöner and holder, als Engel es sind'.

3. Da liegt es, ach Kinder, auf Heu and auf Stroh! Maria and Joseph betrachten es froh. Die redlichen Hirten knie'n betend da vor; hoch oben schwebt jubelnd der Engelein Chor.

On Christmas Eve the entire congregation went to church to begin the Christmas celebration. The Protestants had a candlelight service to signify that Christ is the light of the world. The Catholics attended Midnight Mass. An hour before services began, the churches were filled and the congregations sang many of the beautiful Christmas songs brought from their native Germany. Among them were "In Bethlehem geboren," "Auf
Christen," "Schonstes Kindlein, bestes Knablein," "Dich grüssen wir O Jesulein," "O ihr Himmel schauet an," "Kommet her zur Krippe," "Die Hirten die waren in Felde," and "O selige Nacht." Often a violin accompanied the organ as the songs were sung.

The sad story of the plight of Mary and Joseph as they seek shelter on Christmas night, and are turned away by everyone is told in a beautiful Christmas song entitled "O liebste Braut. " The melody used in Herzog, Russia is completely different from the one used in Obermunjor, Russia. The Herzog version of the melody is given below.

1. O liebste Braut, wer hatts entraut, O dearest bride, not one person will Kein Mensch will sich erbarmen, show mercy or give us shelter this Der these Nacht uns Herberg macht, night ......How evil we poor are treated Wie ubel gehts uns Armen. in our sad plight.

2. Es ist keine Gass' noch eine Strass There is no lane or not even a street, Die ich nicht durch gelaufen, that I have not walked through, Und doch hab' ich fur mich and dich Keine Herberg angetroffen. And yet, I have found no shelter for me and you.

3. O Joseph Mein, soll's moglich sein, O my dear Joseph, how can it be? - Dass she sich Freunde nennen, They call themselves "friend", in the In David's Stadt, in uns'rer Stadt, City of David, our home town, and yet Nicht wollen uns erkonnen. will not recognize us, but on us frown.

4. So mussen wir die Herberg hier, We will then have to seek shelter, Auf freier Strass aufschlagen, In the open street; This night we will Doe kalte Droht, die bittere Not have to bear - The imminent cold and Heute Nacht wir mussen tragen. bitter need.

5. Maria rein, dies soll nicht sein, Mary most pure, this shall not be. Ein Mittel ich noch finde. Sieh I will find a solution. See yonder stable, dort der Stall schutst uns dermal, our shelter it shall provide . . . from cold Vor kalte Frost and Winde. frost and wind . . . there we can abide.
6. So sei es dann, geh' du voran, 
Ich folge; Gottes Willen.
So wohl in Freud als Traurigkeit, 
Ich trachte zu erfüllen.

So be it then, lead the way, and I'll obey. It is God's will, Now then in joy and sorrow, I shall endeavor to fulfill my mission before the morrow.

In *Paradise on the Steppe*, Joseph S. Height describes the customs of the day after Christmas:

St. Stephen's Day (Dec. 26) was known as *Wandertag* or *Bindelestag*, for on that day the term of service for maids and farm hands expired, and they packed their bags to begin work under a new master. Their youthful friends and companions gave them a boisterous send-off in carriages that were driven up and down the street at break-neck speed amid exuberant singing and, clamorous shouts of farewell. The departing servants invariably chanted the humorous ditty:

*Heut isch mei Wandertag, heut isch mei Ziel.* (Today I pack my bag and go my new way;)
*Schickt mich mei Bauer fort, gebt m'r nit Viel!* (My master sends me off without much pay!)

Then they sang the traditional Wanderlied: "Es, es, es and es", in which they bade farewell to their employers while expressing their mock disdain of the master's work and the housewife's meal of "Speck and Kraut" (page 191).

This song was popular in the Odessa region of Russia as well as in the Volga area.

There are a number of New Year songs, the most popular of which are: "Auf das *Neu Jahr*" and "*Es ist nun mehr die Alte Zeit.*" Another song entitled "*Nicht weiter sollst du dich erstrecken*" talks of the new covenant made with Jesus on New Year's which shall last forever.
Nicht weiter sollst du dich erstrecken

( N i c h t w e i - t er  s o ll s t d u d i c h e r - s t r c k - e n  D u
( D e r d u d i e H e r - z e n n u r m i t S c h r e c - k e n  M i t
al - t e r B u n d m i t d i e - n e r L a s t.  D e r n e u - e
b a n - g e r F u r c h t e r f ü l l - l e t h a s t.

B u n d s o l l e - w i g d a u - r e n.  D e n . J e - s u s H e u t m i t
u n s g e - m a c h t,  E i n B u n d d e r o h - n e F u r c h t u n d
S c h a u - e r n.  N u r f r e u d - l i c h - k e i t u n d L i e - b e m a c h t.

F R O H L I C H E W E I N A C H T E N !